

“SHOWING OUT:” APPAREL OF FAILURE IN *GATHER TOGETHER IN MY NAME*

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Gather Together in My Name focuses in particular on her experience as a failure process leading to her eventual achievement. Her second autobiography encompasses "the more universal issues about self-government, self-reliance, and self-realization" (McPherson 62). In addition, whether her failure originates from family, job, or love comfort, her personality development expose an inspection of archetypal femininity when she is unable to use fashion products effectively. Items like Vinylite high heels and the foundation of Max Factor make a model beauty that disorients, deform and complicates Angelou's self-identity. Leslie Rabine claims that fashion has an impact of "structuring the symbolic order of the male / subject female / object, making female a paradigmatic object" (Rabine,p. 65). By comparing a bombed relationship or business adventure with costly attire or cosmetics, Angelou exemplifies this style worldview and its consequent perplexity.

Angelou's insight of prettiness is embedded as her fashionable, pretty mother in the role of Vivian Baxter. Before *Gather Together in My Name*, Angelou presents a bitter and miscommunicated mother-daughter relationship. Sent to Stamps by herself with her brother, Arkansas, at three years old, Angelou felt relinquished by her folks, and later in an interview she said that Baxter was "a poor mother for a child" (Paterson,p. 121). However, she makes another dynamic with her mom in her subsequent life account. Angelou never again feels unpleasant towards Baxter yet considers her to be "probably the best individuals ever" (Oliver 136). She later talks about the extroverted character of Baxter, remembering how her mom would say, "They're spelling my name Woman" (Oliver, p. 136). The confident femininity of this statement echoes the tone of Baxter's quality in *Gather Together in My Name*. It resonates specifically with Angelou's perception of the physical presence of Baxter. Thus Baxter's clothing and makeup fashion she wears invites study as an embodiment of Angelou's values of beauty and impact on Angelou's evolving identity. While Angelou's seventh autobiography, *Me & Mom & Me* (2013), concentrated on her mother's relationship, in *My Name's* references to Baxter, Chapter II utilizes only *Gather Together*. In most of her autobiographies, however, Angelou "often contrasts Vivian Baxter's delicate stature with her own awkward size, Baxter's lovely face with her own solemn face, and Baxter's bravado with her own reticence" (Lupton 27). These contrasting esthetics demonstrate the foundation of the comprehension and connection of Angelou with her own fashion and beauty.

Angelou struggles particularly with her view of magnificence dependent on white skin and blonde hair in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. Her worry with excellence also permeates her second autobiography, particularly given the significance she attaches to the instance of her mother modelling costly clothes, high heels, and the high confidence that a black person can exude in her head. Hilton Alys writes in

an article for The New Yorker, "Angelou needed to characterize herself, as most ladies, by not turning into her mom. In any case, how might she rival a woman who was so shrewd and crafty and who was found overpowering by such huge numbers of guys?" Angelou may not have tried to become her mother, but she undoubtedly kept her as an embodied picture of beauty and achievement. After the trust and style she sees in her mom, Angelou fashions herself. In the approximately 35 pages that allude to Baxter, the inebriation of Baxter's style sense shows itself either quickly or when she is a dominating character in a scene; of these references, Angelou makes reference to Baxter's design or magnificence multiple times expressly. What's more, an additional six pages involve a reference to Baxter together with a portrayal of her different darlings' physical style, her child, Bailey, or Angelou, herself. Angelou produces a pattern of associating her mother with beauty, even if it comes from someone else ; on these pages she defines the boyfriends of Baxter with their costly coats and Bailey with his "plum pretty black color" and "teeth ... white as promises" (GTIMN, p.303). This pattern confirms that with lovely individuals Baxter surrounds herself. The description of Angelou herself, however, does not represent a similar stunner as Baxter, her sweethearts, or Bailey. Angelou partners magnificence with the nearness of her mom in *Gather Together in My Name*, yet bars herself from this dynamic.

A large number of these scenes depict the character of Baxter alongside her appearance, especially her raised confidence. The lips of Baxter frequent the pages of the narrative of Angelou. In one scene, Angelou says her mom "reached (never far away) for her lipstick tube" creating a Baxter-make-up connection bordering on fixation (MNGT, p.297). Further in the scene, Angelou recalls how, before stepping out on a date, her mom exuded self-assurance.

She pasted a waxy kiss on my forehead and draped her kolinsky over her shoulders.

“How do I look?”

“Beautiful.”

She tugged the furs into a more casual drape and laughed, “You only say it ‘cause it’s true.”(GTIMN, p.298)

In a drumming rhythm, her high heels touched the door. (GTIMN, p.299) The account of waxy lips shows that Baxter wore lipstick, meaning that Angelou remembers the kisses of her mother covered in makeup. Although lipstick produced with "an oil and wax base went into restricted use before World War I," early "indelible" lipsticks were produced with "waxes and alcohol," as wax gives the structure and solidity of the lipstick (Lauffer, p. 366). Cultural history of Lipstick invites femininity to different organisations. At the beginning of the twentieth century, "wearing a lipstick was broadly viewed as ethically flawed and from the domain of whores and on-screen characters" (Eldridge 175). At the same time, the taboo nature of lipstick prompted public efforts to ban all cosmetics at state level and protest against the women's rights movement (Schaffer, p. 22). Carol Dyhouse writes, "The rosy mouth had progressed toward becoming what Angela Carter portrayed as one of the amazing glitzy twentieth-century shows, and the very demonstration of putting on the lipstick had increased numerous implications, from confidence through incitement to insubordination (Dyhouse, p. 67). "Ladies were effectively empowered by World War II to paint splendid

red and reflexive in their lips to look after profound quality. Red lipstick was an enthusiasm mark and exhibited a readiness to win "(Eldridge, p. 175). Angelou once again cites her mother wearing red lipstick, right after the hysterectomy of Baxter. Angelou reaffirms the strength of her mother by remarking on her "red lips" (GTIMN, p.356), even in the hospital bed. In this scene, the red lips of Baxter represent her desire to conquer any disease; they also restore any femininity that some females feel losing through hysterectomy. Thus her bedridden state means both a fear of being seen in a hospital bed and a pathos of losing her uterus, so the allusion to her red lips reaffirms Angelou's perception of the trust, emotional strength, and defiance of her mother.

Angelou further defines the link between the lipstick of Baxter and her self-assurance in a drastic passage where Angelou returns home to discover a messy ambulance and police scene. She first notices the outfit of Baxter, reminding her mom of "slipping into her suede jacket" and continuing her fashion association (Angelou 318). Then, despite the alarming disarray, she defines Baxter's quiet smile when Baxter quietly "checks her make-up in her compact mirror" (GTIMN, p. 318). "The glamorous act of touching one's lipstick with a lovely mirrored compact has become an significant cultural gesture" (GTIMN, p.174), as Lisa Eldridge observes. Susan Keller describes the significance of this act as "one of the quintessential pictures of urban modernity which was also extremely scandalous: the figure of a woman applying powder or lipstick in public, transforming the town into her boudoir... Powdering in public... epitomizing fresh attitudes towards self-sufficiency and one's civic identity" (300-301). Angelou details the self-sufficiency of Baxter, symbolized when her mom describes the situation in the picture of her fixing her makeup. The boyfriend of her mother attempted to threaten Baxter in a fit of jealousy with a knife, but she cut him off before he could hurt her. Baxter called for her bleeding ex-boyfriend to the cops and the ambulance. Baxter impresses the significance of never allowing anyone control her when she completes her tale, telling Angelou to always be autonomous and self-assured.

People will take advantage of you if you let them. Especially negro sic women. Everybody, his brother and his dog thinks he can walk a road in a colored woman's behind. But you remember this, now. . . Let them catch it like they find it. If you haven't been trained at home to their liking tell them to get to stepping...Stepping. But not on you. (GTIMN, p.320)

In her daughter, Baxter's significant tries to instill pride and self-assurance present her as a redemptive mom or, at least, in juxtaposition with the mom described in the first autobiography. Even though Angelou is alienated by her beauty, this mother figure offers stability and reassurance in the fight of Angelou to secure her own identity.

Apparel becomes a relief from a taxing or emotional condition in Angelou's therapy of design as a steady in Baxter's life. The two scenes recorded above reinforce the association between close to home misery and firm fashion ability. Angelou defines the furs in the passage before Baxter leaves for her date and keys the wear of her mom. While the confidence of her mother is evident, her question, "How am I looking?" Suggest that most individuals might feel the slightest hint of nervousness on such an occasion. Angelou, however, reaffirms Baxter's trust with the sway of her furs and the drumming of her heels. Baxter

seems to be in tune with her clothes. The Kolinsky drapes more casually after Angelou suggests that Baxter looks lovely. The fur provides her a reassurance of her beauty. "Animal hair epitomized glamour sic in the 1930s. You can write it down, sit on it, or dress it on and around your body. Women demonstrate in a number of movies how wealthy they are by walking on it... a fur coat inspires fear and disgust, lust and desire as no other garment can "(Dyhouse, p. 35-37). With glamour and beauty, Baxter's ease with fur exemplifies her ease. Before this scene, Angelou is constantly linking the emotional state and apparel of Baxter by describing a discussion with her mom about the crumbling moment of Baxter's marriage. In this passage, she describes attentively how Baxter's "fingers still glittered with diamonds and how she was a weekly client in the city's most costly shoe store, but her beautiful face had lost its carefree ornamentation and her smile made me no longer think of daybreak" (Angelou 247). Angelou considers a clear link between the decreasing happiness of her mother and growing fashion attention. Fashion can produce mood-incongruent outfits, as Alison Guy and Maura Banim note in their research. For instance, when she feels emotionally down, a female may dress up.

Women talked of their aspirations relating to their clothes and of attempts to create images which were perceived as successful. Success was measured on two levels, feeling positive because they 'looked good' and the feeling of being able to achieve that image through the correct choice of clothing. Comments about 'The woman I want to be' reflected instances where women's understanding of their identities and their bodies 'clicked' with the use made of a particular set of clothes. 'The woman I want to be' is physically realised sic as the woman I feel I am when I look good. (Guy and Banim, p. 316)

Moreover, the females in their examination felt increasingly hopeful about their identity in the event that they simply envisioned the garments they had not yet had but rather would make them feel compelling. Guy and Banim found that clothing creates three self-conceptions: "The woman I want to be, the woman I think I can be, and the girl I am most of the moment" (Guy and Banim, p. 316). In Angelou's narrative, Vivian Baxter's clothing represents the perspective of "the lady I want to be' which reflects pictures that have already been realized sic and are aspirational, and that could be accomplished" (316). Baxter wore jewel rings and exorbitant hide shawls to perceive that she had not yet accomplished a success in love.

The attractiveness of her mother goes beyond her own physicality and feelings, reinforcing the impact of Baxter on Angelou's beauty connection. Physical appeal started to indicate the inheritance of discernible beauty and inherent achievement for Angelou. She first creates a generational delight by reviewing how Guy Johnson's mother says "each goodness as a reflection of her Baxter's own" (MNGT, p.231). By connecting her son's beauty with her mother's beauty, Angelou purposely contrasts her seemingly inherent splendor with her absence of it. Angelou later emphasizes this hereditary beauty by describing the Baxter family's applause for the physical qualities of her child as got from Baxter. Her aunties and uncles pass between them, admiring his head's roundness, but Angelou thinks that the physical characteristic is "more than a beauty symbol. It was a sign of a bloodline's strength "(MNGT, p.250). In addition, her family takes note of the high curves of Johnson's feet practically identical to Baxter's past high-instep acclaim; the

cover of their compliments stresses the noteworthiness Angelou appends to the excellence of Johnson descending from her family instead of herself. Angelou reaffirms this idea when she depicts two ex-colleagues incredibly viewing the excellence of Johnson, demanding that he looks whiter than black, that Angelou "strives to pay Johnson's dad for offering her that child," and that "a crow gave the birth of a dove" (MNGT, p. 237-238). This scene degrades the appearance of Angelou and beautifies her perceived absence of beauty.

In addition, Angelou claims physical characteristics not only as a DNA marker, but also as an inner empowerment. For her, the elitism of the fashion-beauty complex works as an endowment for those who have it and for those who don't. For those who fit into the complex yet impenetrable to anyone who can't, physical appearance stays a collective. The beauty of Baxter distinguishes her from that of Angelou, especially as someone who felt like Angelou had all the physical features of a lovely black lady: brief stature, light skin and a lovely face. Angelou needed to battle a normal female excellence of dark ladies, epitomized during the 1920s by her alluring mother with her fur garments and jewel rings. During that moment, "all significant newspapers... featured appealing Black women on their covers... negro sic females who were unique, accomplished, gorgeous, smart, industrious, talented, and prosperous. During the Second World War this momentum persisted as competitions of beauty and pages flourished in black societies" (Willis and Williams, p. 172-174). However, in comparison to the natural hair and dark-skin aesthetics that arose in the 1960s (Willis and Williams 174), "these contests marked a sort of black beauty based on a Western ideal." Baxter becomes the famous lady with her light-skinned beauty, while Angelou still finds herself outside.

However, when considering the collective, Angelou's inheritance from her mom resonates particularly important. Angelou spoke about the impact of slavery on parental inheritance in an interview with Bill Moyers in 1973:

We were brought here from social orders which had matrilineal legacy in West Africa, which our matrilineal legacy still gets in West Africa. That is, kids acquire from their mom's family, with the goal that things remain in the mother's blood line. . . . Indeed, servitude clearly precluded any opportunity of patrilineal control. However, there was the matrilineal strength. (Moyers, p. 20)

In her subsequent collection of memoirs, Angelou's father, for the most part missing from her life, shows up, so Baxter turns out to be especially fundamental as the exemplification of excellence and accomplishment. Factually, contemplates have demonstrated that "most African American girls derive their body image from models and courses taught by other black females they know instead of forming media pictures" (Willis and Williams, p. 169). In understanding Angelou's perception of herself, Baxter's existence was critical. Angelou recalls a moment when her mom told her in an interview with Judith Paterson in 1982, "I believe you're the biggest lady I've ever met... because you're smart and merciful. These two things often don't go hand in hand. Angelou doesn't think her mom at first, but she is convinced that Baxter would never lie to her. Angelou feels an overwhelming, mind-boggling gratitude when he sees his reality. The affirmation of Baxter

has a tremendous importance for her daughter. *Gather Together in My Name* defines the distance or limit between herself and her mother, but affirms the significance of Baxter in the development of the identity of Angelou. The story ends with the return of Angelou to the home of Baxter.

Fashion marks several important moments that have not yet been discussed in this narrative. Clothing generally means important emotions that Angelou can't put into words altogether. She can't remember her first experience when she falls into prostitution, just the "scratching of the man's zipper on my upper thighs". His clothing literally marks her memory and body. Also, Angelou utilizes cosmetics to associate her physical appearance with her failure to prevail all through the story. The way Angelou places imagery in garments speaks to an increasingly mind boggling perspective on herself. Her voice refuses to dismiss failure moments, so instead it demonstrates their embodiment. Analyzing the clothing and makeup representing her fighting *Gather Together in My Name* shows a greater complexity in the narrative of Angelou. Angelou, who has indicated repeatedly that her willingness to tell her tale has been a willingness to talk about human experience. Commenting extensively on black women's experience, Angelou defines her experiences as "the black American woman who literally nursed a concept of strangers. And he's been sympathetic. For me, this is survival. She's powerful. And as opposed to being exclusive, she is inclusive. She has included in her career all the rest of mankind and has often been excluded from their lives "(Weller 17). This quote reflects the life of black females who find no empowerment in apparel and makeup like Angelou. Until recently, the foundation overlooked minority women's variable skin tones. While the Pancake formula of Max Factor improved the lighter skinned beauty of Baxter, the darker skin tones of Bea and Angelou would require a distinct formula. She discovered that African American females with darker complexions had excellent difficulty finding foundations to suit their skin tone in the 2013 research of LaPorschia Davis. According to Rose Weitz's definition of "strength" as having the capacity to control or impact others to achieve required objectives, makeup can empower females (Davis , p. 58). Although "some African American females have found the strength of cosmetics... when they attain a perfect look or alter their appearance from day to night at any specified moment while using cosmetics," a large group of females are unable to feel likewise empowered, neglected by the beauty sector. (Davis 58).

Study by Davis emphasizes the significance of studying the failure of Angelou to manoeuvre the beauty universe. At the same time, *Gather Together in My Name* typifies the incorporation of Angelou and uncovers her rejection from the female fashion world. The clothes and makeup pose an alienating paradigm of beauty even though it surrounds her in her family and friends. Nevertheless, the easy act of exposing this exclusion refers to the autobiographical concept of "proving yourself so thoroughly and then admitting what you discover" (Weller 16). In this narrative, Angelou's willingness to encapsulate the prevailing human spirit resonates as she overcomes her insecurities about her appearance and her young adult life's barriers. The fashion products representing these insecurities and barriers become symbolic of a bigger class struggle, revealing much more about Angelou than she writes explicitly.

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